Bill No.: SB-594
Title: AN ACT PROHIBITING THE USE OF CERTAIN CONTRACTS FOR THE SALE OR LEASE OF CATS AND DOGS.
Vote Date: 3/8/2019
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute
PH Date: 3/1/2019
File No.: 219

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SPONSORS OF BILL:
Sen. Leonard A. Fasano, 34th Dist.
Sen. Martin M. Looney, 11th Dist.
Rep. David Michel, 146th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:
Concerns have been shared with the Environment Committee in regards to intentionally deceptive pet leasing practices. In many cases, buyers are offered what they believe to be a loan program for the purchase of a pet; however, in reality such buyers unknowingly enter into a lease agreement. These buyers, believing to be the owners of the pet, are shocked, surprised, and heartbroken in cases where the pet is repossessed because of default on a payment program, or at the end of a lease. With certain limited exceptions, the bill seeks to prevent these deceptive practices by (1) banning the leasing or renting of a dog or cat after October 1st 2019, and (2) provides an option to buy a dog or cat at the end of the lease term. Additionally, the bill states the owner of a dog or cat in lease contracts is the person in possession of the animal.

Substitute Language – LCO No. 5711
Concern was brought to the attention of the committee in regards to certain industries that may rent or lease animals. For instance, purebred dogs may be rented for breeding purposes, and the motion picture industry may rent out an animal for the production of a movie. Substitute language provides exceptions to the pet leasing and renting ban for (1) purebred dogs rented for breeding purposes, (2) animals used in a spectator event, show
exhibition, motion picture or other media, and (3) working animals trained to perform tasks, such as guide dogs or law enforcement dogs.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None Expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Senator Bob Duff, Senate Majority Leader, 25th Senate Dist.: New York, California, and Nevada have enacted laws to ban pet leasing. Pet leasing is a practice “built on deception and cruelty”. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) is against policy of leasing animals as part of the sales process. The ASPCA in their statement says “Deceptive, predatory finance arrangements benefit only the lending company and the pet store – not the consumer and certainly not the puppies.” Testimony also provides an example of a young woman, Christina Diskin, who was a victim of predatory and misleading leasing practices when she purchased her pet at the Dog House in Manchester, CT. Ms. Diskin was encouraged to enter into a financing program, believing it to be a loan, from Wags Lending. In actuality, Ms. Diskin entered into a lease – documents were not printed and reviewed with her prior to her signature.

Senator Leonard A Fasano, Senate Minority Leader, 34th Senate Dist.: This bill is similar to legislation passed by the Connecticut Senate during the 2018 legislative session and considered in other states throughout the country such as Nevada and California. According to the ASPCA, pet leasing is a predatory practice targeting those who are unable to afford a pet. Furthermore, the Federal Trade Commission has identified pet leasing as a new industry with extremely high costs on consumers who are unaware they have entered into a lease. Also included with testimony is (1) an Office of Legislative Research report on state laws prohibiting pet leasing, and (2) various news articles explaining the issues faced by families.

Annie Hornish, Connecticut Senior State Director, The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS): Puppy mills is a source of the problem of the deceitful practice of pet leasing. Consumers are pressured to sign the agreement not realizing this lease agreement can cost the consumer more than twice the original purchase price of the animal. Such leasing agreements have become common and problematic, the Better Business Bureau and Federal Trade Commission are looking into issues with the pet leasing industry’s trade practices. HSUS shares testimony of Natalie Sullivan, a woman who purchased a puppy from a New York pet store in 2016.

Connecticut Bar Association – Animal Law Section: States such as California, Nevada, and New York have limited the predatory practice of leasing a dog or cat. These types of agreements could potentially be in violation of the Connecticut Unfair Trade Practices Act. While the consumer may believe they are purchasing an animal by way of an installment sale, in actuality, they do not have ownership rights of the animal until the end of the lease term. Furthermore, consumers may not understand at the time of the transaction that they (1) will pay more than the original price of the animal, (2) may be required to return the animal if
they fail to comply with the terms of the lease, and (3) are responsible for continuing payments even if the animal dies.

*The Environment Committee received approximately 20 similar testimonies stating that (1) pet leasing is a predatory practice, (2) other states have enacted similar legislation, and (3) buyers often believe they enter into an installment plan when they enter the lease.*

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None Expressed.

Reported by:  Steve Smith / Ussawin R. Bumpen  Date: 3/29/2019